

Whole Person Learning and Assessment

A Worthy Destination and a Way to Correct Course

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Pioneering congregations in New York, known as the Coalition of Innovating Congregations*, are significantly altering the direction of Jewish education. They are no longer heading for seventh grade *bar and bat mitzvah*, although it remains a stop. And they no longer are heading toward empty promises like learners will “learn Jewish values, pray in Hebrew, celebrate holidays, love Israel, know Torah, practice mitzvot, and be lifelong learners” as a result of attending religious school classes two to six hours a week. Rather than heading toward a way station or along a route unlikely to reach its destination, these Jewish educational leaders have set a new course supported by LOMED (Learner Outcomes and Measurement for Effective Educational Design). These congregations are headed toward focused priority goals.

A few worthy, reasonable, long-term outcomes for learners, priority goals derived from their vision, equips these congregation with a “North Star” for making decisions. Replacing an unruly list of disparate outcomes, Coalition congregations focus on long-term priority outcomes such as, learners will be on a journey “of helping mend the world,” or “applying Torah to daily life.” The assumption behind priority goals is that learners who deeply experience and reflect on a meaningful Jewish journey in their youth, will be prepared to construct their own life journeys rooted in Judaism as adults.

Teachers and educational leaders who are redesigning congregational education to reach priority goals have to make informed decisions. Random anecdotes about students aren’t enough. Check lists on how well a child reads a Hebrew prayer is also insufficient. To know how, when and where learning needs to take place, Coalition congregations are pioneering a new framework for assessment.

For the Jewish journey: **Whole Person Learning and Assessment**. The whole person framework, adapted from research in university education and day schools, creates learning and assessment about what a child knows (head), what a child puts into action (hand), what a child believes/values (heart) and where a child belongs (feet). The whole of a person, not just the head or the heart, needs to be nurtured to enable a Jewish child to grow to be an engaged Jewish adult.

“We were very good at teaching and assessing skills and knowledge,” says Nancy Parkes, Director of Temple Israel Center (TIC). “Whole person learning expands our reach.” Through LOMED TIC identified a priority goal for children to apply Torah to

daily life. Knowing Torah is not the same as living Torah. So, in a first year pilot, leading teachers at TIC identified outcomes for kindergarten children's knowledge, actions, beliefs/values and sense of belonging. Then, to gather the data on whole person growth, TIC enlisted parents as assessors. Parents learned how to document children's Jewish experiences over a year. Children were given teddy bears to accompany them on their Jewish journeys, and parents were given scrap books to collect the data. Amy Bitterman, a parent of twin sons, said, "It's more than learning from a book." Her record of the year includes her children purchasing and giving food to a shelter, attending family holiday celebrations and having chats about Jewish values. "So much of what families do is living Jewishly," says Parkes, "but it goes unnoticed until they pause to document."

Teachers in LOMED apply whole person learning to all ages and all subjects. A seventh grade teacher created the following assessment for a course on the Holocaust. Notice the teacher measures how learning impacts the whole of her students.

Know: What does it mean to "remember?" Why is it an important Jewish value?

Do: Describe two things you've done or could do to avoid events like the Shoah from happening again?

Believe/value: Why do you think it is important for you to learn about the Shoah?

Belong: Describe in what ways learning about the history of your people has connected you to your classmates.

Coalition congregations, supported by LOMED, say they've seen three immediate benefits from whole person learning and assessment.

- First, they are developing laser-like focus on what's most important. Focus on what's worthy and attainable in a part time model of education releases educational leaders from the myth they can do it all.
- Second, they have data to correct course. When teachers and educational leaders collect evidence of growth, or lack of it, they can adjust the learning experience.
- Finally, this framework supports the creation of 21st century models of Jewish education. Because the outcome for learning is the whole child, a classroom alone won't get you there. So these congregations find the whole person framework stirs innovation in expanding the classroom to real life, the family and the community.

Coalition congregations dare to say part time educational programs can't achieve everything. Strengthened by their visions, they set a course toward a few worthy outcomes for learners. Whole person learning and assessment supports the arduous and bold work of redesigning congregational Jewish education. Collected data corrects the course. It's never easy to be a trailblazer. *Kol hakavod* to the congregations leading the way.

LOMED: Learner Outcomes and Measurement for Effective educational Design

Lomed in Hebrew means learn. LOMED in New York means create powerful Jewish learning in congregations that moves to life!

To create powerful learning 24 leading congregational teams grapple with four essential questions about learning and measurement:

1. What are our long and short term goals for learners?
2. How do we build 21st century models of congregational learning that includes the family, the community and real life experience?
3. How can we measure learner's growth over time to inform continued innovation?
4. How do we continue to build ongoing teacher education about measurement and powerful learning so congregational learning moves to life?

These congregations, known as the Coalition of Innovating Congregations of New York, lead the nation in creating powerful Jewish learning inspired by compelling visions of education.

Their bold visions imagine a Jewish education for children and families that nurture the whole of a person (knowledge, belief/values, action and a sense of a belonging). Jewish education for meaningful and purposeful life journeys.

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